



The 6-step guide: How to choose a fleet monitoring solution

Whatever the objective - whether it be increasing operational efficiencies, improving performance or enabling better decision making with data-driven insights - ship managers, shipowners and charterers all require real-time, fleet-wide situational awareness. But with so many free and paid-for fleet monitoring options available, how can you tell which solution is right for your business?

But which solution is right for your business?

Here are 6 tips to help you find the right solution for you:



Read our 6-step guide to choosing the very best fleet monitoring solution

1

Find a proven supplier

When asked what the most important factor when choosing a tracking/SSAS solution provider was, more than 70% respondents told us that **reliability** was the “most important” factor in decision making (*Purplefinder brand values survey*).

But how can you tell whether a prospective service provider is reliable? Here are several questions you can ask to help you evaluate and compare the reliability of suppliers.

- **How long have they been in business?** How long your prospective supplier has been in the market is a good indicator for reliability. Many start-ups fade away within just a few years of entering the market, leaving their customers stranded without support. Moreover, recent start-ups are more likely to have ‘bugs’ in their software than their more established competitors, who have had more time, and likely have more available resources, to invest in R&D.
- **Are they financially stable?** Think of your new supplier as an investment. Not only will you invest some of your budget, but your time as well. If that company were to fail, that investment would be lost. It is easy and inexpensive to do a quick background check on potential suppliers. Look out for signs of financial instability.
- **Do they have enough staff?** How many people do they employ? Do they have enough support and finance staff to cope with their customer base (not just today but also in the future)? Do they have round-the-clock customer support? (via email and phone?)
- **Have they invested in their infrastructure?** As their client base grows, so too will the strain on their infrastructure. Have they invested in enough good quality, scalable infrastructure with the capacity and bandwidth to meet your needs? Is their hardware offering reliable?
- **Do they have a disaster recovery plan?** We all hope the worst won’t happen, but it is important that your suppliers plan for that ‘worst case’ scenario, to ensure that the impact on you and your business is minimised.
- **Do they have system monitoring tools in place?** In the event of service degradation or downtime, you’ll want your solution provider to know about it before you do. With appropriate systems monitoring in place, your supplier will be able to identify potential problems faster. In some cases, they may even be able to resolve them before they impact you, the user.

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Consider an enterprise-standard solution

Whether you’re working for a small business or a large one, you could benefit from working with a solution provider that has adopted enterprise standards.

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What is an enterprise solution?

Enterprise solutions are designed to integrate multiple facets of a company's business through the interchange of information from various teams and departments. These solutions enable companies to retrieve, disseminate and analyse mission-critical data throughout their organisation, providing them with real-time operating information.

Why choose an enterprise solution?

In the ever changing digital landscape, remaining competitive can be difficult. Enterprise solutions make it easier by bringing together disparate data sources and different business areas into a single solution. You benefit by unlocking the insights hidden in your own unconnected data that allow you to make decisions that improve your business.

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Choose the best vessel monitoring technology for your needs

✓✓✓ Good: AIS-only vessel tracking

AIS-only ship tracking is an excellent and cost effective option for non-essential ship tracking. However, due to its inherent limitations and vulnerabilities, you should consider alternative options (e.g. secure satellite or secure satellite + AIS tracking) for your mission-critical or operational fleet monitoring needs.

Some AIS providers will only allow you to track a small number of ships in near real time. Most are delayed for 24 hours. This may not deliver the situational awareness that you need.

Here are just a few of the pros and cons of AIS tracking:

👍 Pros	👎 Cons
Easy	AIS is inherently insecure, can be falsified and uses no data validation
Low cost	Due to latency and message collection limitations, AIS coverage can be patchy, meaning vessel positions will be irregular or unreliable.
Can track all ships	The ship's AIS transceiver can be switched off
	Some suppliers delay data, meaning vessel positions are not up-to-date

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✓✓✓ **Better:** Secure satellite tracking

Unlike AIS, secure satellite tracking options (such as Inmarsat's world leading global satellite communications service) offer higher frequency (near real-time), more accurate tracking data. In contrast to AIS data, which can be manually falsified, Inmarsat tracking is secure and tamper resistant. It is approved by the IMO for the monitoring of international transiting vessels. In fact, Inmarsat is relied upon by governments, flag registries and major shipping companies.

✓✓✓ **Best:** Multiple vessel tracking data sources

Solutions that combine tracking data from multiple sources have many advantages. Using two or more data sources allows you to cross-check results for consistency. The use of multiple sources can also enhance your confidence in any conclusions drawn, and offset the limitations of any single data source.

Look for a supplier that combines:

- **Secure satellite tracking data** (e.g. Inmarsat)
- **Terrestrial AIS**
- **Satellite AIS**

Spotlight: Blended tracking

Our patent-pending blended tracking technology combines position report data from multiple tracking data services (including Inmarsat-C, IsatData Pro and AIS) into a single, seamless position track to provide you with richer, more accurate information.

- **More accurate:** More position data, more often means a more accurate position trail.
- **Validated:** By combining two or more sources, position data can be validated and anomalies identified.
- **More reliable:** In the event that a single transceiver stops reporting (e.g. if the AIS is switched off), the position trail for the ship won't be interrupted as the remaining transceivers continue to report.



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Avoid supplier lock-in

Look for a fleet monitoring solution that is hardware agnostic (i.e. offers a wide range of hardware integration options) to ensure that all your ships can be viewed within a single solution. This gives you flexibility when it comes to replacement tracking hardware and helps you to avoid expensive and time consuming fleet-wide hardware roll outs.

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Supplier lock-in

Avoid fleet monitoring suppliers that only support their own proprietary hardware and require you to replace your existing hardware with theirs. Not only is this process time consuming and costly, it also locks you in and makes you dependent on a single supplier. Ask your supplier which third-party equipment they can support.

Fleet-wide hardware rolls-outs

Alternatively, using a fleet monitoring system that only supports its own proprietary hardware could force you to maintain several fleet monitoring solutions for each hardware model in your fleet, which is both inconvenient and costly.

By choosing a supplier that can integrate a wide range of third party hardware, you'll benefit in 3 ways:

1. **No supplier lock-in**
2. **No expensive fleet-wide hardware roll-out**
3. **A simple and consistent user experience, regardless of the hardware that is installed aboard the ship**

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Get value for money

Cost is an important consideration in any buying decision, and especially in the difficult economic conditions currently facing the maritime industry. However, most of us have learned (the hard way) that when the price seems too good to be true, it usually is.

You'll invest your own and your team's time, as well as money, in your new solution, so make sure that the solution you choose delivers real value for your organisation. Here are some things to look out for when you evaluate:

- **Is it intuitive and easy to use?** Unintuitive solutions will take longer for you team to learn how to use, and will slow your team down in the long term.
- **Is the data updated regularly?** Check whether data (such as zones, maps and weather data) are updated regularly so that you know you can rely on it.
- **Is the solution scalable?** Scalable systems can adapt should your business grow.
- **Does it integrate with other systems?** Connecting data from different departments and areas of operation can deliver greater efficiencies and actionable insights. Look for solutions that offer and support an API that will allow you to integrate it with third-party or in-house apps.
- **Is the system flexible enough to adapt to your needs?** Being able to customise what users can do with the system will improve cost management and ease of use.
- **Does the system offer the right reporting and notification options?** It is important that you can extract information quickly and easily as well as get informed about important exceptions to normal operation.

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Free trial

Most suppliers offer a free trial. Do a test drive to see if the service meets your needs before you commit.

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Demand the highest standards of customer service

Hours of operation

Shipping is a 24/7 industry, meaning you could need support at any time of the day or night. Check whether your prospective supplier's support team operates on a 24/7 basis or whether they are limited to office-hours.

Channels

Ask your prospective supplier how you can reach them in the event you need support. Email support is useful, but sometimes you'll need an instant response, so make sure the prospective supplier offers telephone support as well. Ask them for the support number and put them to the test - try calling and see long they take to respond.

Global and local

Whether you're making your first enquiry, raising a support case or requesting a new feature or enhancement, it is reassuring to have a point of contact who is available in time zone and speaks your local language. Regional offices and a network of local partners will mean your supplier can serve and support you better and faster.



The Pole Star Platform is the enterprise-grade fleet monitoring solution for organisations that demand the very highest level of reliability and customer service from a proven and trusted supplier.

To find out how the Pole Star Platform can make your job easier, save you time and help you achieve your business objectives, register for a free trial without obligation, at: www.polestarglobal.com/trial